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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the Sindhi language diaspora, the biradari, across India and Pakistan looks at the implications of this geographic dispersal for the cohesion of the Sindhi-speaking community and culture. Three sociocultural characteristics of the scattered population are identified: urbanization; near-universal literacy; and bilingualism. Patterns of ethnic/linguistic identity and language choice in various cultural circumstances are also examined. Rapidly changing patterns of ethnic mix in previously Sindh areas are identified. It is concluded that information technology offers a means for continued connection and networking within the now geographically dispersed Sindh community. Contains 17 references. (MSE)

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LINGUISTIC DIASPORAS AND THE SINDHI BIRADARI *1

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In spite of recent political efforts promoting contrived homogeneity in the patterns of verbal usage in the country through administrative reforms, linguistic minorities in all states and Union territories in India, however, add up to a quarter of the total population (as per the 1961 Census). One can identify three major types of minority groups :

(1) Those belonging to a larger speech community in the country (or outside) which dominates over a neighbouring or distant territory amd enjoys its language rights as a majority. Depending upon the language awareness among the speakers of the minority language, their group identity gets reinforced through the diasporic links transcending physical space, e.g. nearly a quarter of the Punjabi speakers in both Pakistan and India live outside their 'home' regions.

(2) Those belonging to the same speech group concentrated in one contiguous territory, a communitarian space, but they come under the jurisdiction of more than one state. Many tribal speech groups in India come under this category:

> Santalis live in Bihar (51 per cent), West Bengal (35 per cent) and Orissa (12 per cent): Kurukhs in Bihar (48 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (24 per cent) and West Bengal (19 per cent); Bhils in Madhya Pradesh (36 per cent), Rajasthan (34 per cent), Maharashtra (18 per cent) and Gujarat (11 per cent) (Khubchandani 1992).

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(3) Those groups confining to one state, and not constituting majority in any region; many tribals come under this category.

The groups maintaining primordial ties of language, caste, religion transcending beyond the communitarian/politco-physical space are here treated as diasporas. Historically the stateless Jewish community (before the creation of Israel in 1948), spread all over the globe, is cited as a classic example of diaspora, signifying psychological/cultural bonds among its members.

In migration studies the term diaspora acquired currency as "cultural groups settled outside the ancestral country" such as the exodus of Indian indentured labour to Mauritius, Fiji Islands, West Indies over a century ago (Jain 1993). Later the term has been extended to many trading communities, though numerically small, migrating to the rim countries of the Indian occean (the Gulf and African coast), South-east and Far-eastern countries.

Since the legitimization of linguistic boundaries within the Indian Union (introduced in 1956), it will be useful to extend diaspora studies to examine the profiles of linguistic minorities living outside their 'home' regions; to review how diasporic links are being fostered among scattered, diffused populations with their ancestral region across states or across nations: such as Tamil settlements in urban areas in the North (Delhi, Mumbai, etc); and Tamil migrations to Srilanka, and neighbouring South-east Asian countries.

India's Partition in 1947 and since then the accelerated

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have created conditions for many linguistic diasporas -- such as Bengali in Bangladesh and India (West Bengal, Tripura); Punjabi in W.Punjab (Pakistan) and Punjab-Haryana (India); Sindhi in Sind Province (Pakistan) and urban surroundings in North-central India; Pashto in Afghanistan and Pakistan (NWFP and Baluchistan), Chakma in Bangladesh and India (Tripura, Mizoram and Assam) -- to strive for a coherent identity under divergent pulls and pressures of demographic composition and language ideologies.

With the advent of information technology giving a fill up to 'knowledge' and 'culture' industries, we are now entering into a phase of communication where dispersed culture groups sharing a common tradition explore organizing the space through the convenient modes of mobility and electronic 'networking'. In the contemporary phase of development, efforts are afoot to bring together People of Indian Origin (PIO), settled overseas all round the globe, into an euphemiral cultural conglomeration, to induce a sense of cross-frontier patriotism and to strengthen the economic ties of 'non-resident Indians (NRIs)'(Motwani 1993). In the current climate of globalization, it fits in with Anderson's (1983) notion of 'long-distance nationalism'.

A cyberspace is created on the global scene through information highways (websites, e-mail, personalized home page, and other networking devices) which, in course of time, can supplement or replace traditional channels of communication linked with physical proximity (i.e. neighbourhood, school, village, metropolis, etc.). The impact of this interactive media is gradually seeping among

many professional bodies and voluntary agencies which are diffused in character. The utility of documentation and dissemination serwices is felt among the academia to build a repository of information amd to generate networking facilities for distance education, non-formal orientations and teleconferencing in general.

Cyberspace can be regarded as an "undefinable place where geoggraphy becomes irrelevant". Space becomes quite fluid encouraging interactions between the local speech community and the time-sharing diaspora such as a recent installation of "Trinidadeshwara Shiva" in Trinidad -- a case of shifting sacred space in the context of global Hindu identity. Such initiatives can usher in a new era of living together (somewhat like the cliche 'global village'), sharing cyberspace in a creative manner, which can pave the way to build a sense of diasporic solidatary among the scattered groups across stattes and across nations.

Exploring the potentialities of cyberspace, Barlow (1996) describes the necessary elements of the new kind of diaspora, a 'virtual' community, which lacks place, and continuity in time, but there is a basic desire to connect, to inter-relate through a value system (a religion of sorts, lacking dogma), a sense of collective stake as well as shared adversity. Recognizing the profound difference between 'information' and 'experience', Ranjit Makkuni (cited in Barlow, op cit), points out to a vital deficiency that it misses the prana "the vital element in the holy and unseen ecology of relationship". In the new paradigm, we will have to escape the issue of borders of cyberspace -- both/neither -- in an open-minded, non-exclusive fashion. By nott

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leaving the space, we move back and forth to different layers and gain a much richer appreciation of physical reality by spending time in virtuality.

The plurality and mobility of diasporic experience in creative writing can transcend the insularity of physical space. For immigrant writers charged with intensive native sensibility (like A.K.Ramanujan) "poetry becomes a dialogue between two spaces -- one naturalized, another innate .... Each self-assumed space of privilege punctures and is punctured by another equally self-validating space" (Akshya Kumar 1998).

SINDHI DIASPORA : A CASE STUDY :

Sindhi diaspora, the biradari, presents a unique profile. A culturally sensitive, diffused diaspora (across two hostile nations, Pakistan and India) has emerged from the pangs of sudden dispersal of a well-knit community hitherto belonging to a relatively homogeneous region -- Sind Province before the Partition. It comprises of nearly eighteen million speakers out of the vast ocean of humanity populated in the Indian subcontinent totalling about 1100 million.

Over four-fifth of the Sindhi-speaking population is engaged in the struggle for rights on its own soil in Pakistan, and a majority of the remaining one-fifth, characterized as 'transplanted' Sindhis, is engrossed with the issues of finding roots in a new milieu. This section of Sindhis is scattered in diverse realings of the truncated India resulting from an aftermath of the

traumatic Partition of the country, fifty years ago.
There are also small Sindhi-speaking communities occupying border regions within the Indian territory known as Kachhis, Tharis and Jaisalmeris.

The dynamics of this dispersal on an epochal scale poses a challenge to 'understand' various issues concerning cultural heritage/legacy of Sindhis in India. Both immigrant and border Sindhis form a microscopic minority, with a share of merely 0.3 per cent of the total population; it literally fits the similie atte mein luuna misal "Like salt in the dough". Different sections of the diaspora are charged with the issues of identity engulfing the realms of politics, culture, language and literature.

At the level of ascribed heritage, i.e. inheritance/legacy, there is a crucial issue of selectivity or a distinct world view, very often subjective: Does a community, as a whole, relate it to a universal hertiage, or different subgroups within relate themselves to the 'distant' heritage from one's own locus standi?

1. In India many cultural leaders among Sindhis, generally utilize (rather cash upon) the nostalgia factor in mobilizing the community effort, and lay stress upon the cherished 'undiluted' sindhyata 'Sindhihood' of the well-knit compact community (i.e. of the pre-Partition times) which can be mystically restored only by gaining a 'homeland' in plural India!! Sindhi masses, on the other hand, seem to be quite contented with their expression of a distinct identity through glorifying the folk diety Jhulelal and patronizing community sant-saadhus and tikaanas

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and accepting the 'acculturated' Sindhi life style, which I call sindhipuno.

2. In the post-Partition Sindh the crucial issue has been opting for the primacy of a pan-Islamic dream of the Founders of Pakistan or of the ancient heritage (pre-Islamic) of the Indus Valley Civilization, of the Rg Veda created on the banks of River Sindhu, along with the Medieval Sufi temper (dubbed as 'diluted' Islam by fundamentalists).

3. In the overseas, many non-resident Sindhis (numerically small, but they carry a greater weight due to their affluence) feel drawn towards the promotion of Sindhi 'culture industry' (through print and mass media, cultural visits back home) to authenticate the exotic i.e. the ideal sindhyata, to enable them in maintaining a distinct identity for themselves.

As per the 1981 Census of India, three districts in the Indian Union comprise Sindhi-speaking population above one hundred thousand: Kutch in Gujarat (409 thousand), Greater Bombay (195 thousand) and Thane, both in Maharashtra (140 thousand). Besides, Sindhi migrants are scattered in over sixty districts, mostly in the Western and north-central regions, where their number exceeds five thousand in each district: Gujarat 13 districts, Maharashtra 16, Madhya Pradesh 14, Rajasthan 11, Uttar Pradesh 2, and prominent cities -- Delhi, Bangalore, Madras, Hyderabad, and Calcutta .

We here present a brief resume of the 'transplanted' language in pluralistic India, and identify the new role Sindhi language is acquiring in an environment vastly different from its original habitat in Sindh, now in Pakistan. One can single out three

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distinct socio-cultural characteristics aquired by the scattered Sindhi migrants which seem to have a significant bearing on the issues concerning their language identity:

1) Urbanization: According to the 1981 Census, 76.7 per cent Sindhi speakers in India are declared 'urban', and 23.3 per cent 'rural'. Among the non-urban population, a majority of claimants are reckoned to be Kacchhi and Jaisalmeri speakers. Migrant Sindhis have very little pull from the rural hinterland.

2) Near-universal literacy: Most of the Sindhi migrants, settled in urban areas and belonging to a relatively better-earning strata, have achieved near-universal literacy -- a dream the rest of India is yet to fulfil.

3) Bilingualism: With the lapse of five decades of the initial wave of Sindhi migration to the partitioned India, it is rather difficult to find a Sindhi speaker regardless of age, who is unable to understand and to make himself understood in Hindi or in a smattering knowledge of the regional language. To say that all Sindhis are bilinguals would be going too far. But there is no doubt that an overwhelming majority under 40 years are so.

A survey of the acculturation processes among Indian Sindhis in a plurilingual milieu (Khubchandani 1963) draws attention to three prominent features of identity namely: (1) the ascribed nature of primordial identity, i.e. given by tradition, (2) the observance of specific traits, like language associated with identity, is generally left fluid, subject to the sensitivity of the group or to individual goals, and (3) the commitment or loyalty to a particular identity is relative to the context

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(and not absolute), or even, at times, voluntary and non-exclusive.

An analysis of the communication networks in the Sindhi community reveals that the native language of bilinguals is usually displaced in the formal settings such as occupation, administration, court affairs, trade, travel, etc. in favour of diglossic use of English and or of Hindi. As the mobility among Sindhis in India and abroad is fast accelerating, the second and third generations reveal a remarkable shift in the profiles of language use, often switching over to English or Hindi, in some cases to regional languages.

A Sindhi native speaker often uses this bilingual facility as a means of identity, manipulating language choice to one's advantage (such as in compound bilingualism, code-switching, diglossia -- all these are common traits of plurilingual societies in the Indian context. Such manipulation is noticed among the bilingual Muslims in India as well who vacillate between religious and regional identities (Khubchandani 1972). Also the reading habits of Sindhi bilinguals are rapidly shifting in favour of Hindi and English.

Sindhi immigrant writers settled, and also those born after the Partition, euphemistically call their stay in India as 'in exile'; but they are not equipped to express their 'undiluted' native sensibility either. A writer's deep Sindhi past gets impinged in the diffused space in number of ways which hybridize her/his creative output irrevocably. After having forsaken the physical space Sindhi immigrants are, by and large, adopting to a multi-fid space where the entire

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Hind, and the shores beyond, can meet the aspirations of Sindhi civilization.

The communication environment among Sindhis in Sind has also experienced a sea change, radically transforming their existence as a community (Kazi 1987). Pre-Partition Sindh was linguistically a homogeneous territory: Sindhi language enjoyed the supremacy in everyday communications as nearly ninety per cent of the population spoke Sindhi, though Hindustani as a contact language was in frequent use in urban areas, and it was being promoted as a part of the swadeshi movement during the Independence struggle. Other languages, Siraiki (Multani), Balochi, Brahvi, Gujarati, Marwari were on the periphery. Different religions (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh) and cultural strands (Amils, Bhaibands, Vaderas, etc.) in the feudal society were integrated with the language in a plural ethos of the Province; unlike the animosities developed under the banners of Urdu and Hindi in the Khariboli belt of the North-central India.

But in the post-Partition Sindh, with the out-migration of Sindhi Hindus and the influx of 'Mohajirs', Pathans and Punjabis, a compact 'homogenous' Sindhi-speaking territory is at the verge of getting extinct; an emerging situation has a striking similarity with the volatile Assam in India. All urban areas are virtually swarmed by Moharjirs. The 1951 Census records Mohajirs in the cities of Karachi 56 percent, Hyderabad 66, Sukkur 54, Mirpurkhas 68, Nawabshah 55, Larkano 35 per cent. Religion-wise, Karachi Corporation area in 1941 comprised of 42 percent Muslims,

48 percent caste Hindus, 3.3 percent Scheduled castes, 2.7 Christians, 1.3 Sikhs, 1.0 Parsees, 0.9 Jains, and 1.2 per cent others. After the Partition, Karachi has become homogenous on the grounds of religion foregoing the linguistic homogeneity: Muslims 96 percent, Hindus (caste and backward) 1.6, Christians 1.7, Parsees 0.5 and others 0.1 percent (as per the 1951 Census).

According to the 1981 census, there are only five districts out of 13 having Sindhi population over eighty per cent:

(a) Thatto 92 percent, Shikarpur 86, Badin 81.6, Dadu 81.5, Khairpur 80.5 percent

(b) five of them can be counted as hetergeneous Sindhi districts: Larkano, Sindhi 78 percent (Balochi 7, Brohi 6, Siraiki 5 percent); Sukkur, Sindhi 74 (Urdu 13, Punjabi 6); Tharparkar, Sindhi 72 (Urdu 8, Punjabi 6); Jacobobad, Sindhi 69 (Balochi 21); Nawabshah, Sindhi 66 (Punjabi 11, Urdu 8)

(c) Remaining three have become multilingual districts; Hyderabad, 56.5 percent Sindhi (with Urdu 28 percent); Sanghar, 56.1 percent Sindhi (Urdu 11 and Punjabi 9); and Karachi, Urdu 54 percent (Sindhi approx. 20, Punjabi 14, Pashto 9). Sindhi language is reduced to a minority in the capital of Sind Province itself (for details, see Rahman 1996).

The dispersal of Sindhis is further magnified by a sizable number of Sindhi Hindus (Mainly Bhaibands) and Sindhi Muslims (Kachhis, Khojas, Memons) having a long tradition of working as traders across the shores in the Gulf, South-East Asia, East African coast and a few European Islands (Gibraltar, Canary Islands, etc.); these are known as Sindhworkies. In recent decades this number has grown rapidly, and a continuous outflow is extended to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, West Indies, and Australia. Now many professionals along with their families also join them to settle in these new pastures. With the affluence the Sindhworkies

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(present-day non-resident Sindhis) enjoy, they are now drawn to the issues of preserving the cultural identity of the widely spread diaspora.

One notices the compact Sindhi homesteads which Hindus were forced to leave at the time of Partition in 1947 and which they nostaligically remember asaanji Sindhurii no longer exist -- neither in India nor in Sindh. The virgin undiluted Sindhi environs have passed on to their 'golden heritage'.

Though I do not believe in the doctrine of cultural ineritability, nevertheless the physical arrow of time cannot be reversed. This inevitability of collosal magnitude cannot be wished away. Sindhi biradari with such a wide canvas has to come to terms with the reality: dudho khiru thane na pave (For the contemporary generation, unfamiliar with the rural Sindhi milieu, an urban similie will be more telling. "You cannot put back toothpaste in the tube".

Diverse speech profiles of Sindhi diaspora provide a strong testimony of the fact that the binds and bounds of a speech community can be visualized differently on the scale of time and space. Symbolically man lives in different layers of space. A base for the community's solidarity, a sense of belongingness, is identified with

* the communitarian space, manifested through the density and intensity of interactions among its members
* the physical space as monitored by State, delineated by language accreditation and privileges in the political set-up
* the cyber space, 'networking' tapped through the dispersed diasporas of native and non-native speakers of a language.

The dynamics of living in many spaces is apparent in the feelings of restlessness among many writers in India as well as Pakistan. One can be optimistic that the trans-linguistic experiences of Sindhi Writer in a plural milieu will enable her/him to 'come out' of the nauseating feeling

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of being in perpetual 'exile' (see Khubchandani, 'Literature of the dispossessed' Aseen Sindhi 1998) and to aspire for more positive goals:

> The man who finds his homeland sweet
> is still a tender beginning
> He to Whom every soil is as his native one
> is already strong
> But he is perfect to Whom
> the entire World is as a foreign land.
>
> -- HUGO

After having foresaken the physical space Sindh, we can sublimate our interests in creating a space Where the entire Hind, and the shores beyond, can meet our aspirations of Sindhi civilization.

The diffused Sindhi diaspora has to come forward to meet with the challenges and opportunities of communication in the twentyfirst century. Through the 'networking' potentials it can be within the reach of the enterprising diaspora to translate their vision into a reality, by thinking globally and acting locally to create an effective community bondage, and give a new meaning to the Sindhi biradari.

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Footnotes:

1. The paper forms a part of the study Language and Communication Rights: Community, the State, and Globalization, being published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, forthcoming. The Section "Sindhi diaspora" was presented in a lecture on Sindhi Heritage at the Sindhi Academy Delhi, Nov 1997.

2. At the International Sociological Congress, Madrid 1990, an activist of the Minority Languages Movement, a Kachhi Memon from Daresalaam whose ancestors were settled on the Zanzibar Islands (Tanzania) over a century ago, narrated an interesting legend tracing the etymology of the term Zanzibar from Zinj-bar, an Arabic version of Sindh-bar 'land of Sindhis' similar to the names of Kathiawar, Malabar on the Indian coast. This legend claims that during the Arab rule many Sindhi traders did flourishing business with East African countries, and a large number of them got settled on the island, now known as Zanzibar.

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